

Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many times I have heard people come out and say, we are going to put a lockbox on these funds. By God, we are going to put a lockbox on this, on Social Security, and lock up all that Medicare.

Right here, before we pass this foolish bill, we are already \$18 billion into the Medicare money. Now we have another \$13 billion here. So now we are up to \$31 billion, and next week we are all going to get a chance to come out here and pass a bill about energy cuts. I have forgotten what that one is. I think it is \$33 billion. And we know that \$500 checking account that we wrote \$1,000 worth of checks on, we are going to write about \$5,000 worth of checks by the time we are done. We are bankrupt, unless we go into Social Security and Medicare.

Now, we can do all the dancing we want out here and talk all about the issue of the first amendment. I mean, people are acting like somehow we cannot fund social services done by faith-based groups. As I said earlier, that is nonsense. Catholic charities, Jewish Charities, Lutheran World Service, on the list goes, the Salvation Army, the whole works, they all have tremendous amounts of Federal money, and they follow rules. And that section of this bill that wants to take away the rules or start bending the rules is going to wind up with people facing indictments. We are going to have ministers who think they can come down here to the government, get a bag full of money and go home and do whatever they want with it, and they are going to wind up being indicted.

Now, we had one of our colleagues, some of my colleagues may remember, runs a great, large church, and he spent a lot of money defending himself against the charge that he was spending Federal money in a religious way. He ultimately won, but we are going to see that this is not a free bag of money to just go and take for church leaders to take home and do whatever they want with. The Supreme Court, the district courts, the courts of appeal have been clear on this issue.

The gentleman from Texas acts like the country started when the Democrats were picking up the pieces after the Republican debacle of the 1920s. This country spent 200 years with a separation of church and State. It does not need this bill, and it is fiscally absolutely irresponsible.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 10 seconds. The Democrats' pile of sorrows grows and grows. The bank that the gentleman described existed only when the Democrats controlled the House of Representatives and ran a bank that did just exactly what the gentleman described.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GREEN).

Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

It is interesting that speaker after speaker today on both sides of the aisle has begun his or her remarks by citing some faith-based organization back in his or her own district that is doing such a wonderful job and then talking about how incredibly supportive they are of those organizations. Yet, with their substitute and with their attacks, the opposition would add burden after burden after burden on these very organizations. In fact, the last speaker would scare faith-based organizations to make sure that they do not take advantage of this law. Worse yet, some of them, some of them would like to remove the religious exemption that these organizations have enjoyed for years and which has been upheld by this body and the United States Supreme Court.

□ 1415

But remember this, the first amendment to the Constitution says that government shall not establish a religion, but it also requires us to honor religious liberty. We have done so for years. We have done so in the years since charitable choice. Some here today would delete that exemption.

Mr. Speaker, maybe we should have that debate on the floor of this House, but that is not the debate today. This is not about scaring faith-based organizations, this is not about putting burdens on them, this is about turning them from rivals in the minds of too many people to partners.

America is hurting. America has needs. America has challenges. Neighborhood after neighborhood has challenges. There are organizations in these neighborhoods ready and willing to make a difference. We should stand by their sides. We should extend a helping hand. If we do this, we can win the war on poverty. We can change America for the good.

I ask my friends to oppose this substitute amendment, support this bill, and let us get it to the President's desk.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON).

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me.

I want to say to my good friends on the left, gee, whiz, they must have trouble sleeping. Since 1996, this basically has been the law, that charitable institutions, faith-based institutions, can participate in welfare distribution, welfare services.

Now all we are doing is saying two things, that we want to expand that eligibility to say that faith-based institutions who are delivering social services, like job training, like drug addiction, like feeding the hungry, that they can participate in grants.

I know Members are very, very proud of the great job that the government has been doing since the War on Poverty. We have only spent billions and billions of dollars, and the poverty level has not decreased.

What we are saying is, let us think outside the box. Let us expand it. Let us let faith-based institutions get in there.

The second part, which is very important, is let people have a charitable contribution deduction on their taxes to encourage more giving to charity. We think this is important.

I know that the left, and I want to say the Washington left, because I want to say to my Democrat friends back home, all the Democrats back home support this. The traditional liberals back home think this is a good idea. I would be very careful before I listen to my Washington friends.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield the remainder of my time to the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE).

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). The gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) is recognized for 15 seconds.

(Mr. THUNE asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, as we close this debate, I would like to say that I had the opportunity last April to travel around my home State of South Dakota and visit a few of the hardworking local charities that would benefit from this legislation.

I am continually amazed by the kind hearts of the neighborhood saints who work and volunteer at these organizations day in and day out. These folks serve the poor, the weak, and the victimized.

We need to support this legislation, because these organizations can make a difference in people's lives. We need to defeat the Democrat substitute and pass H.R. 7.

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from New York (Mr. NADLER) be allowed to manage the 15 minutes allocated to the Committee on the Judiciary.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Washington?

There was no objection.

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 2 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that we have been forced by the Republican leadership to consider many of the principle problems with this bill in one substitute amendment. It would have been better to have an open debate on separate amendments, but that might have been proven embarrassing.

Therefore, we have this substitute, which does several things. It prohibits employment discrimination and preemption of State and local civil rights laws with Federal funds, it provides offsets for the costs of the bill, it deletes the sweeping new provisions permitting agencies to convert more than \$47 billion in government programs into private vouchers without congressional review, and it protects participants from religious coercion.